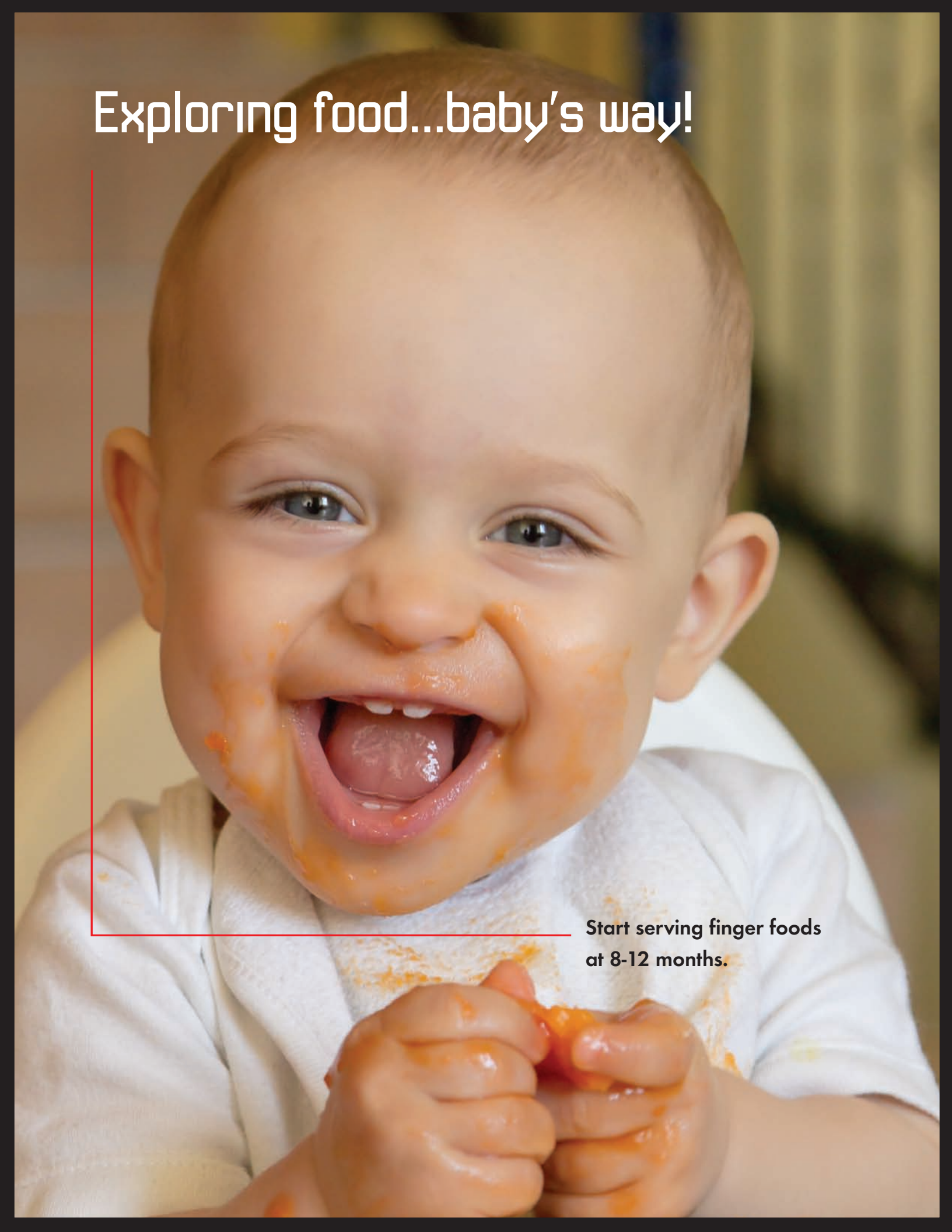


Exploring food...baby's way!

A close-up photograph of a baby with light skin and blue eyes, smiling widely. The baby's face is covered in orange-colored food, likely pureed carrots or sweet potatoes, smeared around the mouth and on the cheeks. The baby is wearing a white bib or shirt, which also has some orange food on it. The baby's hands are visible at the bottom, also covered in the same orange food. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a wooden chair or table.

**Start serving finger foods
at 8-12 months.**

a time of amazing changes

It hasn't been that long since you brought your baby home from the hospital. What an amazing adventure it's been! Your baby has gone through some truly dramatic changes—changes that have been fueled, no doubt, by good food and a healthy dose of love. It is no wonder these two essential elements are the building blocks for healthy habits that will be enjoyed for a lifetime.

Here are some common questions moms ask about feeding older babies:

Can my baby feed himself yet?

Chances are, your baby has already answered that question! He is probably starting to put things in his mouth, and may be reaching for that spoon. Be patient and expect things to get a little messy, but isn't it great that your baby wants to be independent? And having fun with his food will help your baby enjoy eating and develop other skills.

Are there any foods my baby should not eat yet?

Keep in mind that babies often swallow food without chewing or "gumming." The following foods should be avoided as they can cause your baby to choke: nuts, popcorn, seeds, chips, dried fruit such as raisins, peanut butter, cheese cubes, grapes, hot dogs, uncooked peas and other raw vegetables, and hard candy. Babies should not eat honey until after their first birthday since it can contain harmful bacteria that can make them sick.

What about side dishes like rice and noodles?

Babies enjoy eating plain noodles and white or brown rice with their fingers. Other fun and healthy finger foods include shredded cheese, toast, canned fruit, beans, tofu and crackers. Remember, foods that may seem bland to you are tasty and exciting to your baby. Avoid pre-packaged and processed foods as they tend to have added ingredients such as sugar, salt, and/or preservatives.

What about baby meats?

It is okay to serve the same meat your family enjoys. However, be sure to grind or finely mince the meat to prevent choking. Some examples of good finger foods for older infants include chopped soft cooked chicken or turkey, or small pieces of meatballs or meatloaf.

Are 8- to 12-month-olds past the allergy sensitive stage yet?

Not yet. Infants and young children can still have allergic reactions to foods. Continue to introduce new single-ingredient foods one at a time and 3 to 5 days apart so you can watch for signs of allergy and determine which food has caused the allergy, if one should develop.

What is a healthy snack for my baby?

Dry cereal, yogurt, soft fruit or cooked vegetable, or shredded cheese. Think of snacks as smaller servings of the healthy foods you normally serve at meals, rather than as different foods.

Are there any foods that might help my teething baby?

Tender gums are often soothed by biting and chewing on these foods: toast, dry cereal, crackers, a frozen bagel or a frozen whole peeled banana. As always, never leave your baby alone when she is eating. Some babies can chew quite strongly on these foods so watch closely that no large piece of food breaks off that can choke your baby.

What about cow's milk (whole milk)?

Experts recommend breast milk (or formula, for babies who aren't breastfeeding) and not cow's milk, until around your baby's first birthday to make sure she is getting enough iron.

sample meals

Morning

- 4-6 tablespoons cereal
- 2-4 tablespoons soft fruit

Snack

- 1/4 cup shredded cheese

Afternoon

- 2-4 tablespoons cooked vegetables
- 2-4 tablespoons cooked kidney beans

Snack

- Water in a cup
- Piece of toast or bagel

Evening

- 2-4 tablespoons cooked vegetables
- 2-4 tablespoons minced meat
- 2-4 tablespoons soft fruit

At this age, breastfed babies usually nurse four or more times a day. Formula-fed babies drink about 24 to 28 ounces a day. Older babies need more food. As babies begin to eat more solid food, their need for breastmilk or formula will decrease.